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SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN
THE CONCILIATION COMMISSION AND
HIS EXCELLENCY KHASHABA PASHA,
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF EGYPT

held in Beirut on 22 March 1949

Present:	Mr. de Boisanger	(France)	- Chairman
	Mr. Yalchin	(Turkey)	
	Mr. Ethridge	(U.S.A.)	
	Mr. Azcarate		- Principal Secretary
	H.E. Khashaba Pasha		- Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt
	H.E. Abdel Monem Mostafa		- Minister Plenipotentiary.

The CHAIRMAN, after welcoming the Egyptian representatives, raised the question of the refugees. He explained that during its tour of the Arab capitals the Commission had been told that the refugee problem must be discussed ahead of any other problem. The Commission had been asked to request assurances from the Government of Israel that the refugees would be allowed to return to their homes. Unfortunately, the Commission had not found the Israeli Government's reply to be satisfactory. Israel had not said that it would not accept the principle of the right of all the refugees to return to their homes. Furthermore, the Government of Israel had considered that the refugee problem was linked with the general peace settlement.

The Chairman hoped that the Commission would not be faced with a deadlock over the question. But, he pointed out, even if the Israeli answer had been satisfactory, the question of the refugees still remained a problem. The Chairman asked for the views of the Foreign Minister on the matter.

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The FOREIGN MINISTER expressed his surprise that such a question, which had been debated at length in the General Assembly, should be raised again. The Assembly had taken the only possible course in proclaiming the right of the refugees to return to their homes. The Foreign Minister felt strongly that peace could not be re-established until the refugees had returned to their homes.

The Foreign Minister drew attention to the fact that Count Bernadotte had stated that refugees must be allowed to return without any conditions, and that the United Nations must undertake to resettle elsewhere those who did not return. In the Foreign Minister's opinion every Arab would wish to return to his own town or village. If, however, there were some who did not, it was because they had no guarantees of a peaceful life in their former homes. The Foreign Minister could see no point in discussing a principle which had already been settled, and thought that it was unreasonable for the United Nations to tolerate the refusal of the Jews to accept that principle.

The possibility that certain of the refugees would not, without guarantees, wish to return to their homes, should not be allowed to bolster the opposition of the Jews to a just principle which had been laid down by the United Nations.

The CHAIRMAN agreed with the remarks of the Foreign Minister from the humanitarian and legal point of view. He pointed out, however, that there was a de facto situation with regard to the refugees and that something must be done about it. He then called upon Mr. Ethridge to explain the way in which the Conciliation Commission saw the problem from its practical aspect.

Mr. ETHRIDGE explained that if the Commission had not been concerned with the principle of return, it would not have sought assurances in that regard from the Government of Israel. He assured the Foreign Minister that the Commission would not relax its efforts to obtain the compliance of Israel with the Assembly's

resolution and the principle established by it.

However, Mr. Ethridge pointed out, there were certain immediate practical considerations to be taken into account. The members of the Commission had personally witnessed the conditions in the refugee camps. They had found political and economic deterioration not only in the camps but also in the localities in which the refugees were located. Gaza, for instance, already had 210,000 refugees and Egypt was returning an additional 11,000. Economically, the area had become stagnant: the burden imposed by the refugees meant that the work of the local population was seriously disrupted. This economic deterioration produced a political deterioration, which was a matter of serious concern not only to the Commission but to the Arab Governments as well.

What was true of Gaza, Mr. Ethridge continued, was equally true of other areas. In Tulkarm, for example, the most arable land was either in Israeli-held territory or in no-man's land. Refugees in the area constituted a serious burden on the local population which, owing to wartime conditions, was less and less able to take care of its own needs. The result was an ever-increasing political and economic deterioration.

In the opinion of Mr. Ethridge, the Arabs must consider whether the establishment of an abstract principle was more important than the actual settlement of the problem. Israel had not said that it would not accept a certain number of refugees but that it could not ascertain that number until a peace settlement had been reached.

Mr. Ethridge thought the Arab States should keep in mind certain realities of the situation. Firstly, it was clear that there would be a number of refugees who, either voluntarily or involuntarily, would not return. It would be unrealistic to ask the Conciliation Commission to undertake to send such refugees back to their homes, and would in fact be against their interests.

Secondly, present relief funds would be exhausted before the problem could be settled. Mr. Ethridge wondered what would happen then. Speaking as a representative of the United States, he drew attention to the \$16,000,000 appropriation which had just been passed by the Congress and observed that it would not be possible to apply a second time to the present session for further funds. Furthermore, he said, the Congress recessed in July and did not reconvene until January. It would thus not be until March of next year that the United States could make a further contribution. The need for interim relief was, therefore, urgent. The Commission hoped the Arabs would present plans for such interim relief through public works and other projects designed to provide the refugees with work.

Thirdly, Mr. Ethridge said, there was an urgent need for the resettlement of those refugees who would not return to their homes. In his view, this problem as well as any final settlement of the refugee problem as a whole, involved the whole economic development of the Middle East. In this connection Mr Ethridge drew attention to paragraph 10 of the General Assembly's resolution of 11 December 1948, which instructed the Conciliation Commission to seek arrangements among the Governments concerned to facilitate the economic development of the area.

The FOREIGN MINISTER replied that there was still, in his opinion, only one possible solution of the problem, namely that the refugees must be allowed to return to their homes. Merely giving relief to the refugees would not serve to reintegrate them. The Palestine question was the result of the desire of the United Nations to aid and reintegrate the refugees of Europe by giving them land which was not theirs. But when the Arabs asked that their refugees be reintegrated, they were told that it was impossible.

The CHAIRMAN replied that nevertheless the problem existed and the Commission was anxious to see the Arab States help in its

solution. Certain of the Arab States had agreed to present their views in the matter and the Commission would have been glad to obtain the same from the Egyptian Government.

The FOREIGN MINISTER replied that he had nothing to add.

Mr. ETHRIDGE asked the Foreign Minister how he proposed to bring about the solution he had suggested.

The FOREIGN MINISTER said that the only possible way to implement the objective of the General Assembly's resolution was to reintegrate the refugees in their own countries and allow them to live in their own way. He could see no other solution.

The CHAIRMAN said that while the Beirut meetings were called particularly to discuss the refugee problem, there were other questions to be dealt with. It would be helpful, for instance, to know the views of the Egyptian Government regarding the internationalization of Jerusalem.

The FOREIGN MINISTER replied that although it had seemed more reasonable to give Jerusalem to the Arabs, in view of their long record of tolerance, the large number of Jews in the City made such a solution difficult. Egypt would therefore accept the internationalization of the City, in the interests of freedom of worship, but only on condition that there would be guarantees that Jerusalem would remain permanently an international City. The Foreign Minister and the Egyptian Government were fearful that when Arab troops were withdrawn, the City would be seized by the Jews. The United Nations would then say that it had been presented with a fait accompli and would take no action. If satisfactory guarantees were given that the City would remain permanently international and that free access to it would be assured, the Egyptian Government would accept its internationalization wholeheartedly.

The CHAIRMAN thanked the Foreign Minister for his statement

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and pointed out that as the resolution called for a permanent international regime, the need for guarantees which were also permanent would of course have to be taken into account.